

**The Bibliotheca Alexandrina:  
A Truly Digital Library for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

**The Internet Archive:  
Towards Universal Access to All Human Knowledge.**



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The Library of Alexandria

On the occasion of the international day of the book, the Library of Alexandria and the Internet Archive (IA) of California, USA have announced a major new partnership to launch the new forms of library work compatible with the digital century.

The Internet Archive, founded by Brewster Kahle of the United States, has donated to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) a most generous gift valued at US\$ 5 million. This donation includes:

- 10 billion web pages from 1996-2001.
- 2000 hours of Egyptian and US television broadcast.
- 1000 archival films.
- 100 terabytes of data (100,000,000,000,000 characters) stored on 200 computers.
- A Book scanning facility for scanning local books

The purpose of the IA, a complete copy of which is now in Alexandria, is to include the main part of the World Wide Web collection. It is a complete snapshot of all web pages on every website since 1996. Since the web changes, this snapshot is retaken every two months. The resulting collection is 10 billion web pages. All in all, this collection has three times more text pages than in all the books of the largest print library: the Library of Congress (LOC). These are not the same pages of the books in the LOC, but it gives a sense of the enormous scale of the IA. Over 10 billion web pages from over 16 million different sites, this represents the voices of millions of writers over the last 5 years.

### **Wayback Machine:**

The way back machine is a user interface on top of the web collection that allows people to surf the web as it was. The US version has been very popular in the United States getting the # 1 website of the year from Yahoo Internet Life and Der Spiegel. This historic collection is already invaluable to scholars trying to understand the interactions between people and events. We expect to build special collections that reflect the interests of the patrons of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

### **The Movie Archive:**

The Movie Archive includes 1000 movies that depict the culture and society of the United States of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A rich Archive that can be used to freely copy and view. Or more importantly, to help people make their own movies using this as free stock footage.

Enabling any child to make their own movies and then redistribute them on the Internet will lead to new forms of expression quite different from current Cinema and Television. This collection will be augmented with digitized movies from all over the world in coming years.

### **Book Scanning:**

The donation also includes a book scanning facility. This high-end facility will allow the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to digitize its own books. We expect the BA to take the lead in scanning and digitizing 50,000 Arabic books. These books can then be accessed from other libraries through inter-library loan.

### **Inter-Library Loans:**

This restricted form of sharing between libraries allows readers everywhere to leverage unique or rare materials. These newly digitized holdings will be also duplicated at the Internet Archive for preservation and access in other parts of the world. Making this library the central library for this region and even for the whole world will leverage the benefits of digitizing and transmission using the Internet. The biggest advantage of this digital library will be focused on providing digital access through the inter-library loan program, which will be done on a larger scale without the delay, costs and risks associated with shipping physical materials. While protecting works from being massively duplicated, the library system can “check out” a work remotely.

### **The Nascent Partnership:**

The policies that will guide the partnership between the BA and the IA are:

- Preserving the heritage for future generations.
- Universal Access to Human Knowledge.

Beyond today, the partnership includes a 6-month internship program for the BA staff at the IA premises in California and up to one million books over the next five years from Carnegie Mellon University.

### **Next Steps for the BA/IA Partnership:**

Now we attract researchers to these facilities and train librarians on how they can be useful. We work with Internet Archive and others to advance the tools needed to make these vast holdings useful. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina will aim at working with other libraries that are interested in pursuing the goal of “Universal Access to Human Knowledge”. They may be traditional libraries, and they may be new libraries like the Internet Archive.

### **The BA as a digital library for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:**

The BA is dedicated to becoming a true digital library for the future in addition to its more traditional functions of serving physical visitors, maintaining and enhancing its manuscripts and book collections. This is in keeping with the goals established for the BA, namely it is to be:

- The world's window on Egypt.
- Egypt's window on the world.
- A center for dialogue of civilizations and cultures.
- A library for the new digital age.

**To be a library for the digital age, the BA has established a strong Information Technology Department (I.T.) and has adopted the digitization of information whenever possible. By far, the biggest boost to these ambitions has come from the generous gift of the IA and the new partnership being announced today. But the partnership fits into the broad system the BA is following:**

- **The Virtual Browser:** this program was donated to the Library by Sweden. It inspired other developments by the technical experts at the Library. The Virtual Browser was made available to the Library visitors during the Soft Opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in October 2001. Such state of the art technology enables the users to review a given manuscript, browse its different pages, magnify a desired part, find immediate translation and listen to related commentary and explanation.
- **The Digital Manuscripts Library:** the main objective of this project is to preserve the manuscripts and rare books from damage resulting from direct contact or poor preservation conditions. Thereby, the digital laboratory digitizes these manuscripts and rare books. The copies are then saved on CDs so that they are rendered accessible to as many readers as possible, which helps facing the challenge of the digital age. The first CD set was released recently and the rest of sets will be released regularly.
- **A special Partnership with the National Center for Documentation of the Cultural and Natural Heritage.**
- **The Digital Arabic Library:** the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has started preparing for this project in order to establish an integrated Arabic library on the Internet. The number of books projected for the first stage of this library will reach twenty thousand books. This library will also aim at presenting some of its books to the world through translating these books into English. Hence, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has signed cooperation agreements with a

number of Arab cultural institutions to build the content of this library. Some of these agreements include the Arab Writers Union, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature in Kuwait as well as the United Arab Emirates Heritage Club in Abu Dhabi. This can become part of the one million-book project, which the Bibliotheca Alexandrina with the Internet Archive are pursuing with Carnegie Mellon University.

- **The Integrated Digital Library Services:** visitors of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina website will benefit from different services of the Library. They will have an overview of the Library policies, priorities as well as its ongoing activities. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina website will shed light on the Library services, acquisitions and material which would enable all researchers in Egypt to benefit from the BA' services.
- **The Inter-Library Loan of digital material:** the Bibliotheca Alexandrina will adopt this concept as a key part of its strategy. Thus, a child walking into any library, say in a village of Mauritania or Yemen, will have access to the great works of humankind. If the required book or video is available in another library, then that child can “check out” the work over the Internet and view it in the library. Inter-Library loan has been a long tradition in libraries where they would share their holdings with other libraries thus virtually expanding the materials available to all. With the digital technology, this can be done on a larger scale.

### **Beyond the BA/IA partnership: A vision for the Future:**

Geographically speaking, there is a plan for disseminating the Internet Archive centers around the world where the first center is located in California in the United States of America, the second one will be located at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and there will be a third center in Europe and a fourth one in Asia. The BA and the IA are committed to the goal of the universal digital library. Preserving the heritage of humanity and ensuring access to all to this heritage is the message of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Internet Archive. We will update and exchange information. This will be the starting point of an international trend towards digitizing the contents of other international libraries. Hence, our nascent BA/IA partnership should grow into an international partnership of many libraries for the purpose of creating an international universal digital library system. Together we can realize the goal of the original Ancient Library of Alexandria, but using new technologies the ancients could not dream of. Whereas the Ancient Library of Alexandria kept the



memory of humanity through papyrus scrolls, the New Library of Alexandria will help keep the new digital memory of humanity through the Internet.

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